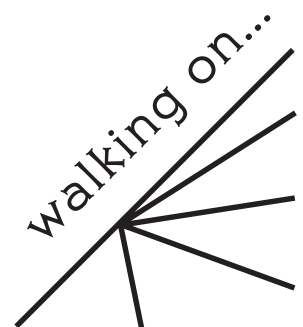


swapathgami



making
our own paths of
learning and living
january 2005



Walkouts Film Festival

In August 2004, Shikshantar and Abhivyakti co-hosted a filmmaking workshop in Udaipur, India. Over thirty *swapathgamis* explored the artists within themselves, both behind the camera and through learning exchanges, dialogues and self-reflection. (Note: you can see more images from the workshop at www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/walkoutsfilm.htm)

Following the workshop, several people decided that it would be a good idea to host a film festival on the theme of "walking out, walking on...". The festival will travel to different cities in India and beyond, with a special emphasis on films made by walkouts from India and other parts of the world. For more on the festival, or how you can get involved, contact Manish Jain <manish@swaraj.org>.



Businesses We Believe In

What are our passions, talents and inner convictions? What are the current needs and interests of the community we live in? What kind of business would serve our communities in the long-term to enhance its well-being, to recover its balance, and to contribute to greater justice? What are the tools and resources we can share to start such a business? These are some of the questions we will explore in our next gathering, "Business We Believe In". It is set for March 2005, in Ahmedabad, India. Walkouts experimenting with different kinds of businesses, and those from among the wider network, will be attending. For more details on the meeting, contact Shilpa Jain <shilpa@swaraj.org>.

The Swapathgami Network

Swapathgami refers to those individuals who self-identify as *walkouts-walkons*. In contrast to the labels of 'dropout' or 'failure', the Network sees the decision to rise out of institutionalized structures, as a positive choice to reclaim control over one's own learning and life. Walking out and walking on is a chance to 'be the change we want to see in the world' by realizing each individual's power to co-create the world. As people who make our own paths, we engage with society from our own perspectives and, in the process, re-configure the relationships we have with the mainstream. The Network has four main kinds of activities:

Learning Journeys – to connect and learn with innovative thinker-doers in different places.

Celebrations/Gatherings/Public Dialogues – to intensely explore challenges/opportunities among walkouts, build strong relationships for future collaboration, and enhance the public discourse.

Communications – to share our stories and experiences, in print and on the web..

Walkouts Sub-Groups – to make new experiments and possibilities (film, art, music, organic farming).

Check out our website <www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/walkoutsnetwork.htm> for details of our experiences. We invite you in co-creating what comes next...

September 2003 - 'A Celebration of Walkouts' - Maharashtra, India

December 2003 - *Chiangrai Dialogue on Walkouts* - Thailand

January 2004 - 'Walking Out at the World Social Forum' - Mumbai, India

February 2004 - *Hindi Swapathgami Bulletin Launch* - Udaipur, India

April 2004 - *Learning Journey* - Kerala, India

May 2004 - *Walkouts Workshop* - Indore, India

August 2004 - *Walkouts Filmmaking Workshop* - Udaipur, India

October 2004 - *Walkouts in Palestinian Refugee Camps* - Lebanon

December 2004 - *Swapathgamis at the International Democratic Education Conference* - Bhubaneshwar, India

timeline of events

what does 'walking out' and 'walking on' mean to you?

I'm a swapathgami because I am trying to determine the course of my own life's journey.

- Gayatri, Indore, India
<indore_amit@rediffmail.com>



What is walking out and walking on? How do we make our own paths in a world where so much is readymade? How can we unlearn the many lies we have been taught in schools, colleges, jobs, mass media? How can we explore our deepest potentials and fullest selves? There is no single answer, no silver-bullet solution. Here is a platform for people around the world who are interested in these questions and more...

our diverse views

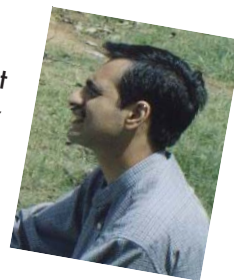
Listening to my inner conscience, trying out different paths, making alternatives with my own hands.

- Panna Lal Patel, Udaipur, India
<panna_lal_patel@yahoo.com>



Recognizing and leaving the violent and exploitative political economy of today, and looking for a more truthful and independent life.

- Ravi Gulati, Delhi, India
<gulatir@vsnl.com>



By keeping my dreams alive, and trying to fulfill them, that is how I see myself as a walkout.

- Rohit Sood, Sikkim, India
<rohit_matilda@yahoo.com>



Walking out is an individual as well as a social effort to assert one's own identity, one's swabhava, and to creatively express it in living. Aware or not, most people at the individual level are walking out (looking at and fighting for different ways of doing things, true to their swabhava) most of the time.

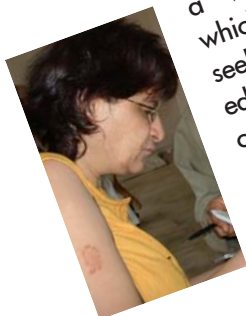
- Priya Nagesh, Chennai, India
<priya@samanvaya.com>

To finally STOP and OBSERVE what we do and how we do it -- and then to CHOOSE something else, something fresh.

- Melanie Kilmarx, Zimbabwe
<melaniek@mega.bw>

There is a woman who lives next door. She is 15 years younger than me and has five children. Her official education is only to the 3rd grade; she can hardly read or write. But she has a wisdom and insight which makes me, a 'Ph.D', seek her advice. Why does education equate an official certificate with wisdom and usefulness?

- Sonia Nimr, Palestine
<sonianimr@hotmail.com>



Relying on your strengths and talents, instead of your degrees, makes you a walkout.

- Nitin Paranjape, Nashik, India
<abhivyakti@sancharnet.in>



When you are pushed to the edge of chaos, you have a chance to discover a new crystal order that lets you realign your work, life, community and world in the most meaningful way.

- Wisit Wangwingyoo, Thailand
<yourservant007@yahoo.com>

why did you walk out of ... ?

a Ph.D. program

I want to lead a life as much in alignment with my values as possible, with as few conflicts as possible, and make it my message to the world. Like John Holt says, "When you find that you are able to do something, the very fact that you can do it means that anyone else who wants to can also do it."

I was unable to come to terms with the fact that, in order to be where I am, I had to go through the current system of schooling (and be 'qualified' through standardized tests) that I am so against. I was unable to justify being in a large institution that is supported by a large infrastructure — the strings that come attached with the donors, and the institutions they are in turn attached to, all of which I am in disagreement with. And by merely submitting to the inevitability of attaching myself to an institution, so I could access this knowledge, submitting to the reality of the luxury of being heard if I earn the tag of 'Ph.D.', I felt like I would fail in my endeavor to 'make my life my message'.

I also had come to believe that universities are among the largest originators and perpetrators of the class system across the world, and all the exploitation that comes along with it. By agreeing to belong to a 'privileged' class of intellectual elite, because only an extremely small fraction of the Indian female population can get a "Ph.D. in an elite American institution", I fear that I am being alienated and that I am contributing to the endorsement and perpetuation of the class system.

And yet if I had said, "In spite of all these negative externalities, I will stay on because one cannot totally remove oneself from the system. This access to critical knowledge is important," etc., I would have ended up spending sleepless nights. Because, to me, how I do anything is as important as, if not more so than, what I set out to do.

- Sangeetha Sriram, Chennai, India
<sangeetha_sriram@hotmail.com>

information technology & the usa



I was working as an IT consultant in corporate America for nearly five years. By most definitions I had 'made it' — good education, good job, nice car, pretty girlfriend, 'success.' Yet, I voluntarily chose to walk away from it all and search for a totally different way of life.

Why? Let me share two reasons, one external and one internal, although both are deeply connected.

I had long since questioned the role of the US government and multinational corporations in dominating the world and recreating it in its own image. But the wars in Afghanistan and then Iraq — though hardly new or different than what the US had long been doing — brought me to a point where I had to make a decision: was this a system I could support? For supporting it I was, through my tax dollars, job, and my way of life — despite going to protests to the contrary. I decided there must be a better way of living, a way of life not based on competition, violence and endless 'growth,' but rather based on cooperation, justice, harmony with nature, etc.

The other reason I walked away was more internal. It's not that I was depressed — in fact I was actually happy much of the time. But I learned that extremes of highs and lows are two sides of the same coin. It is like a drug. In fact, I found that much of my life was like a drug. I was addicted to so many things: to money, work, material wealth, impressing others, etc. Like any drug though, there was no real satisfaction, no contentment, no peace — only a desire for more. And like any addict, my character suffered for it. I realized I had become competitive, stressed out, selfish, greedy, individualistic. I did not have any real love for others, was certainly not content, and had little peace of mind. That was hardly the person I wanted to be. And so, after a long struggle, I quit my job, sold my belongings, and left America in search of truth, in search of a better way of living and being, both externally and internally.

- Roy Jacob, Kerala, India
<studentoflife@fastmail.fm>

10 Lies My School Taught Me¹

10. Western science and technology can solve all of our problems.

9. Big bombs and big armies will give us security, protection and peace.

8. Competition and greed will bring out the best qualities in us. I can only win when others lose.

7. Only Western-style parliamentary democracy can lead to a more just and free society. It gives people a real voice and real choices in the decision-making process.

6. All life and happiness revolves around money; without money you can't do anything meaningful. If the rich get richer and GNP increases, then the benefits will someday trickle down to the rest of society. So, it is good for the poor that rich people become richer and consume more.

5. America and European countries are 'Developed' nations. America and European countries are financially richer because their people are smarter and work harder. People around the world are poor because they are lazy and stupid.

4. Human beings are separate from Nature. Nature must be conquered/controlled/ exploited in order for human beings to progress. Furthermore, common people cannot be trusted to take care of their natural resources and communities – only the Experts are qualified to do this.

3. Over-population is the biggest problem facing the world today. If the poor people would just stop reproducing, everything would be okay.

2. English is a superior language and my local language, Mewari, is inferior, backwards and uncivilized.

1. India became independent in 1947 and I am a free human beings.

For the past twelve years, I have been in a deep process of searching and unlearning. During this period, I have worked in many different contexts (ranging from Wall Street to the United Nations) and travelled to many diverse communities around the world. I have tried to seek out alternative perspectives

**System ordered 'Silence',
I wanted to shout.
I walked out.**

**System ordered me to believe the things,
That I wanted to doubt.
I walked out.**

**Rivers of creativity are now flowing,
Forests of imaginations are growing inside me,
Being in the system was like mental drought.**

**Nothing mastering me anymore: past or goal,
I'm feeling like a free soul,**

**I can shout now, I can doubt,
Thank God, I walked out.**

- Japan Pathak, Ahmedabad, India
<japanpathak@yahoo.com>

around living a life of dignity: its dilemmas and possibilities. Many of these (sometimes uncomfortable) experiences have led me to question and unravel many of the "Truths" I had been taught about success and failure, and many of the goals and expectations which had been laid out for me by mainstream society. They have also helped me to understand the complex systems through which people are continuously being manipulated and being rendered paralyzed. Reflecting on the various lies that I have been fed has helped me to begin to tap into new relationships, learning opportunities and strengths within myself. It has also given me profound hope in terms regenerating creative alternatives in the face of the dominant, violent world order.

I am working on a booklet compiling different lies that people have exposed in their own lives. I invite you to share the lies that you have been taught by school, through the mass media, from the market economy, from the government, by religious institutions, etc.

- Manish Jain, Udaipur, India
<manish@swaraj.org>

¹ I should clarify that I was indoctrinated in a public (government) school in the United States. These lies were taught to me through both the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum.

Chilled Out: Freeing Myself from the Fridge

So many times, when we talk about our childhood, we see our past years in terms of our class in school etc. We say, "When I was in Class Six, we moved to this town." Or, today when people give directions in a city, the landmarks are the transformer, water tank, police station, secretariat, etc., unlike the old days when landmarks were a mango or *neem* tree. Similarly, sometimes we talk about our past in terms of before and after the entry of a particular consumer good in our lives, and try to see how we were affected by it.

Since I was born before the days of globalisation, there was a time when even to get a scooter we had to book it and wait for years. So it was for the telephone too. For me and a lot of my friends, we distinctly remember the day our family got a fridge or television. Before the entry of the fridge, we used to cook just enough, and mostly there were no leftovers. And when food did remain after our dinner, we used to check with our neighbours. If they hadn't eaten yet, we would send the food to them. I remember that if some *rotis* were left, they were given to the cows or dogs the next day.

When I had a fridge in Bombay, I realised that I began to cook more. I thought that food should not fall short, and I never minded if it was more, since I could keep it in the fridge. Often, though, the food that was kept in the fridge was not eaten the next day and had to be eventually thrown out. I am never keen on cold water, so I didn't need it for that, but I used to have some milk instead. I had been thinking of CFCs and ozone depletion but could never bring myself to get rid of the fridge. I used to make plans of using it as a cupboard or a book rack. I even thought of putting it in the garbage dump.

One day I was reading an article on Shikshantar's website <www.swaraj.org/shikshantar> in which the author said that her question was not how to change the world but how to change her relationship with the world. She even talked about how Americans empty their spirits and fill their shopping bags at the supermarket. And the worst part is that they want the whole world to emulate them.

I realised that as people who have been schooled, our notion of environmental conservation is still at

*"If it [the law, the government, the system] is of such a nature that it requires you to be an agent of injustice to another, then I say, **break the law**. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn."*

- Henry David Thoreau

In this section, different people highlight the ways they are challenging the Readymade World (the mechanical and institutional order that claims 'more consumption' is the answer to each of life's questions). The contributors share how the small steps they are taking in their own lives can serve as a 'counter-friction' to the dominant machine, and how they are co-creating ways to more balanced and meaningful living.

an academic level. We know that it is wrong to cut trees and somehow it affects the environment, but we don't see our lives as connected to them. It's like the difference between children who are taught environmental conservation and tribal children whose survival depends on trees. They see things differently. I remember a Bishnoi saying, "Even if you lose your life saving a tree, it is still less."

I had also read about the Hypocrites Club <www.pioneersofchange.net>, where people gather to discuss their hypocrisies. I realised that my fridge was one of my hypocrisies. I also thought of our pre-fridge days in Jaipur, and I realised that they were as happy as our post-fridge days. So, I decided to give my fridge to my niece, who was planning to buy a new one. Now that it's gone, I have more space in my house, and I feel much lighter. I have become more conscious of my contribution towards making this world toxic.

I also realised another of the lies my school taught me: the newspaper is an important part of our lives and we gain some knowledge it. As it was, I was sick of the news of all the socialite parties. But it then became more clear to me that the newspaper is just one media that goes to everyone in the city and is moving us towards homogenisation. Apart from making our minds toxic, it also is responsible for robbing forests from tribals and contributes to pollution in the process of manufacturing ink. So I also decided to stop getting the newspaper.

Now I am eyeing the two-wheeler I have. I still can't figure out how to get rid of it, but I welcome any suggestions.

- Shammi Nanda, Mumbai, India
<shammi_nanda@yahoo.com>



Discovering Outside Discovery

'You must watch National Geographic. It's just the thing for you'. If someone says this to me one more time, I am going to blow up. Watching Discovery or National Geographic seems to be the latest 'in-thing' for

showing your concern for animals today. Everybody wants to prove their love for animals by talking about how they just can't get enough of Animal Planet.

I have nothing against any of these channels. The photography, especially of the underwater sea world, is beautiful and extraordinary. But I find that while everyone wants to sit and watch what's showing on their TV, not one of them can even spare a moment to find out about things going on in their own backyard.

At 23, I am the oldest of three brothers. I distinctly remember the family discussion at home some 15 years ago on the subject of TV. My parents have always been opposed to buying a TV and they were trying to explain to us the reasons why they were not falling in line with the TV-buying public. We couldn't understand all their arguments until they finally put it to us this way: TV is for those who will never get to experience the real thing. 'Do you want to actually visit, some day, all those beautiful places they show on TV? Or, would you rather be happy with just seeing them on the screen?' The choice simply put was: Buy a TV or travel around instead. We chose travel. And I am proud to say that to this day, we have never allowed the idiot box any space in our house. We have travelled instead to almost all parts of India. I learnt snake catching in Pune, handled crocodiles in Mamallapuram, studied spiders and earthworms in Chennai, and even travelled to Thailand and Malaysia in my quest to learn more about reptiles. All of which I managed to do because I never sat in front of a TV.

So, what's there to see in the backyard? Well, have you

ever noticed the different type of insects around? Grasshoppers, locusts, bugs, beetles, ants, spiders, geckoes, snails and shrews riddle almost every household. But they are little aliens to us when we compare them to the lions and tigers prancing around on Animal Planet. Do you know that spiders aren't insects? They have eight legs instead of six. Same with scorpions. They belong to Aracnida. But, why bother, since every once in a while we swoosh away all the cobwebs in our homes and send all the spiders scuttling around for safety, their homes destroyed. Even in big cities, one can find toads, frogs, snakes and birds. How many birds do we know the names of, other than just crow or pigeon? How many wild plants do we know the uses of? Earthworms are found almost all over, but I can't think of one National Geographic fan who has bothered to collect a few and setup a vermi-bed in an effort to tackle the kitchen waste that we all produce everyday.

So many people watch snake shows, but zero is the number of people who will be able to identify a snake on that basis. And close to 90% is the number of these TV viewers who would happily smash a snake, should one cross their path. I have had many avid National Geographic viewers ask me very basic questions like: Is it true that snakes seek revenge? or Do some have two heads?

If you are just a casual channel surfer or watch Discovery for the great photography (I have to give them credit for that), and you have no other interest in the world around you, then you have no reason to feel hurt or offended by my article. But, if you are interested in learning something, then buy a book (about whatever you want — snakes, insects, birds). You will learn more reading for 30 minutes a day, than you would if you managed to catch every TV show on the subject for the next two months. Start bird watching, collect insects. It's very easy when you have a little genuine interest.

- Rahul Alvares, Goa, India
<cna@sancharnet.in>

To learn more about Rahul's experiences with snakes, spiders, and other special creatures, check out the magazine he created, "Creepy Times", available on-line at <http://www.geocities.com/rahulsnakesite>. You can also order his books, *Free from School!* and *The Call of the Snake*, from Other India Press: www.goacom.com/books

Organic Experimenting

I was born into an experiment-full family, in that we love to try and create new and different things. My father had left city life and decided to return to our village. He has been organic farming for the last 20 years, inspired first by M. Fukuoka's book *One-Straw Revolution*, then later by his own experiences with it. My mother grew up in an ashram with Vinoba Bhave.¹ She never went to school, and instead learned about life, and all of life's work, in the ashram. Our family built our house with local materials like mud and natural twigs. It stays warm in the winter and cool in the summer. We don't use electricity for light either; we have bio-gas lamps.

Since I was a child, my whole way of learning depended on doing. That meant my mistakes were really important. Of course, it was impossible to learn this way in school. When I was young, I thought I would study science after my 10th class, because I would get more chances to do practical things. But, I soon realized that 'practical' only meant mixing some chemicals, watching the reaction, writing what happened... There was really no chance to learn with my hands or use my own mind. Everything was basically done on paper, and all the answers were already known.

When it came time to do my B.Sc., they were teaching us about the Himalaya's environment — its plants, trees, animals — which had absolutely nothing to do with where I was. I wanted to learn more about my local place, to better understand it. So, I walked out of college and more seriously dived into organic farming as an inspiration for life. Now I would be able to learn by doing at every moment. When I made the decision to leave college, my parents fully supported me. They said, "Now your real talents and potentials will be able to emerge!"

Organic farming is not just my livelihood, but also my life. I learn something new every day from farming. There are thousands of worms working in the earth. We farm trying not to disturb them. The insects that eat our crops, we don't use any chemicals on them. Even natural

¹ Vinoba Bhave was deeply inspired by Gandhi and contributed much to understanding and realizing the potential of village self-reliance.

**Walking out of a certain way-of-life
Where I am supposed to be happy,
because this is what they tell me
Walking out of having money
Walking out of power games
Walking out of certainty
Trying to be
Walking on the edge,
Where life can surprise me
Where I can see beauty
Walking on my destiny
Walking on the fields, touching my land
Walking simply.**

- Claire Mollard, France <mielvideo@yahoo.fr>

pesticides, like cow urine, we keep to a bare minimum. Mother Nature usually takes care of everything (like by sending birds who enjoy eating these little pests.) My life philosophy also comes from organic farming. What we take from the land, we should return back to it. Even the weeds that we pull up, we leave them right there on the land.

Farming comes easy to me. Unlike some of the other boys in my village, who have gone to school, I am not ashamed to do this work. I learn a lot from the people in my village too. There is so much wisdom in them. In school, I studied to get high marks to please someone else. Now when I study, it's to fulfill my own curiosity.

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if organic farming was eliminated from the world by the hands of those powerful multinational companies. My goal is make farming self-reliant and independent of companies for seed, fertilizer, etc. I've been working with farmers to collect and save seeds. We also make our own 'super-fast' fertilizer of cow urine, manure, jaggery and water. We store this mix in a bin for five days in the summer, ten days in the winter, and then have readily available an organic and potent fertilizer.

These days, I am working to understand how we can take care of our own needs at our village level. I believe that if each locality uses its local resources well, in balance with Mother Nature, it will have enough for its own food, clothes, building materials, soap, etc.

- Vinay Futane, Maharashtra, India
<vinayfutane@rediffmail.com>

Translated from Hindi by Shilpa Jain

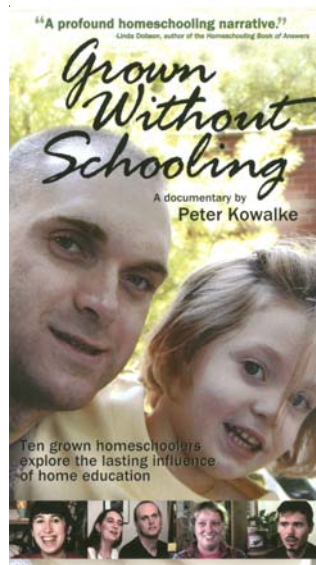
My First Documentary

I wanted to make a documentary. In early 2000, there was a lot of propaganda about homeschooling in the United States. While I wholeheartedly agreed that not going to school made sense, all the “turn your children into prodigies” rhetoric irritated me. I wanted a video that candidly showed the highs and the lows of adults who never attended school, a documentary that told my story and the story of many of my friends. Because no video like that existed, I decided I’d make one myself. There was one problem: I was a 20-year-old college walkout with no real film experience. I knew only that I didn’t know anything about making documentaries.

But, I was naïve and undaunted. I borrowed a basic video production textbook from the library and gave myself a crash course. The textbook wasn’t very helpful, but from that came a list of roughly 40 influential documentaries I took it upon myself to study, which led to other videos, books, training exercises, etc. Before I consciously realized it, I had replicated a year of film school. The personally relevant parts, at least.

I knew nothing about screenwriting when I began, either — and I still don’t. There was no script, at least not in the traditional sense. I had outlines that kept evolving as the documentary moved forward, but not the usual scene by scene script that notes all the dialogue and visuals. The documentary was made “cinema verite,” which means I turned on the camera and hoped something interesting happened. I didn’t write scenes in advance. This was nerve-racking for a guy like me, someone who hates surprises and rarely is spontaneous.

The cinema verite style is relatively common in the documentary world, but it is more challenging because the producer doesn’t have control. No one does. That’s why beginning producers and professionals who churn out documentaries often avoid the style (or pretend scenes weren’t scripted). I chose the style against the advice of



friends and my better judgment, though, because I wanted the grown homeschoolers to co-create as much of the video as possible; they just would be actors in my story if there was a script. And, my ideas alone probably would just make another propaganda piece. Again, I was naïve and undaunted. Foolish, probably. Sometimes foolish gets you where you want, though.

A small crew and I spent a month on the road interviewing ten grown homeschoolers in all, which meant that we didn’t have weeks to leisurely record our subjects. All my preparation made this intensive schedule possible, because I knew in advance which questions would get good answers and which events to have the camera cover. I ended up with some 55 hours of raw footage consisting of discussions and events. I then logged each interview question and action into a database that I could search and cross-reference as I edited.

Many ideas were covered in the footage I finally used, but one idea in particular really resonated with me: If something as seemingly fundamental as school could be wrong (for some of us, at least), what else should be questioned? Many of the grown homeschoolers weren’t afraid to question everything — marriage, what it means to have a good job, etc. This resonated with me, because I often battled with my own questioning voice. Hearing others frame it as a byproduct of their homeschooling experience somewhat comforted me. I had license to think these thoughts. What they said bothered me a bit, too. The interviews implied that I probably couldn’t avoid questioning everything even if I tried.

Friends didn’t expect a documentary from me, and I didn’t know I’d make one, either. But, I felt that a documentary needed to be in the world. In March, 2002, *Grown Without Schooling* debuted at a large homeschooling convention in Chicago. Since then, hundreds of families and homeschooling support groups around the world have watched it.

- Peter Kowalke, Ohio, USA
<peter@kowalke.info>

Peter eventually married one of the grown homeschoolers he met while making Grown Without Schooling. Learn more about the film at <www.grownwithoutschooling.com>

From Idea to Documentary

Preproduction

- Identified interview subjects
- Researched documentaries
- Created a list of questions
- Conducted preshoot interviews
- Learned video equipment
- Found volunteer crew
- Created production schedule
- Built initial story from concepts on index cards

Postproduction

- Logged footage into database
- Edited footage together
- Arranged music
- Showed video to test audiences
- Revised video
- Sent video for film reviews

documentary world, but it is more challenging because the producer doesn’t have control. No one does. That’s why beginning producers and professionals who churn out documentaries often avoid the style (or pretend scenes weren’t scripted). I chose the style against the advice of

This section of *Swapathgami* offers a number of potential resources and opportunities to support you in unfolding your own path of learning. Some of these exist in several countries; others are tied to a particular place. Some ask you to raise your own funds to access them; others provide funds for you. But all of them are open to walkouts-walkons as sources of friendship, understanding, insight and fun. If you decide to use any of these opportunities, do share your experiences with the rest of us!

Organic Farming Around the World

International Worldwide Workers On Organic Farms (WWOOF) is an association dedicated to helping those who would like to volunteer on organic farms internationally. WWOOF aims to:

- Enable people to learn first-hand about organic growing techniques.
- Enable town-dwellers to experience living and helping on a farm.
- Help farmers make organic production a viable alternative.
- Improve communications within the organic movement.

WWOOF organisations compile a list of organic host farms that welcome volunteer help from time to time. These hosts are in many countries around the world, including India. WWOOF provides the contact information for these farms, but it is up to individuals to make arrangements with the places that interest them. Visit <www.woof.org> to find organic farms near you!

Servas - International

Servas is an international peace association run in over 100 countries by volunteers. Founded in 1949 as a peace movement, Servas International is a non-profit organisation working to build understanding, tolerance and world peace. It operates through a dual network: on one side are Servas hosts around the world who are interested in opening their doors to travelers; on the other side are many open-minded travelers who want to get to know the heart of the countries they visit. Through Servas, travelers have opportunities to meet hosts, their families and friends, and join in their everyday life. Where convenient, hosts may offer two nights' accommodation and invite travelers to share a meal.

Walkouts-Walkons may like to volunteer with Servas as either a host or a traveler. The only requirement to join as a host is the willingness to offer hospitality to travelers of any race and culture. Servas hosts are just a cross-section of ordinary people. Servas asks that its travelers be ready and willing to experience other societies more deeply and with more understanding than they would be likely to do as tourists.

There are more than 13,000 Servas 'open doors' scattered throughout almost every country in the world. Names and addresses of hosts appear in annually produced lists which are made available to approved travelers. To receive this list, contact a Servas director near you by visiting the Servas website at <www.servas.org>.



Youth Jams

When musicians get together and play unprepared music, or 'jam', they create songs that have never been heard before. Not only

does memorable and beautiful music emerge, but the musicians have a chance to share their unique skills and knowledge, while learning from other musicians. This fertile ground of diversity, trust and joy sprouts some of the richest seeds in history. Such is the inspiration for Youth Jams.

Youth for Environmental Sanity (YES!), based in California, USA, is the main coordinator of Youth Jams. These week-long events connect, support and inspire 30 committed young leaders (ages 15-30) from all around the world. Participants are selected given their commitment to growing and building positive change on three simultaneous levels: the internal (they are growing spiritually and personally); the interpersonal (they are seeking to bring love, integrity and honesty to their relationships); and the societal (they are building a world of justice, dignity, peace and balance). Of potential interest to *swapathgamis* are the World Youth Leadership Jam and the Leveraging Privilege for Social Change Jam.

To learn more about each of these, or to apply to an upcoming Jam, visit the YES! website at <www.yesworld.org>.

Multiworld Underground

The Multiworld Network <www.multiworld.org> has recently launched the Underground, an exciting partnering process for those in India who are interested in taking their learning back into their own hands.

The Underground draws its name and inspiration from the Underground Railroad, a spontaneous, evolving, informal organization in the 18th and 19th century. Neither "underground" nor a "railroad" in the literal sense, this network of black and white Americans assisted enslaved African-Americans in escaping to freedom. It occurred when the slave trade of Europeans and white Americans was at its height, in a time when it seemed impossible to break its stranglehold on African people. Yet, though the risks were high and the penalty for getting caught was death, people still had the courage to resist the dehumanizing institution of slavery. As many as 100,000 enslaved people escaped in the 100-year-old existence of the Underground Railroad.

Today, we need of a similar level of courage. Young people in India (and around the world) stand face-to-face with another kind of brutal slavery: the mental, physical and spiritual enslavement promoted by factory schools and colonial colleges. The constant onslaught of competition, pressure and violence, coupled with the hopelessness of the global economy, have left many young people frustrated, angry and/or depressed. As some have had the strength and support to 'walk out' of such bondage, they are looking for places and relationships to 'walk on' to. It is to support such 'freedom seekers' in their struggle — to know themselves, to set their own learning paths, and to make beautiful contributions to their world — that the Underground has been launched.

Just as the slaves' flight to freedom was made possible by the courageous men and women who believed in the right of all humans to be free from bondage, so too does the Multiworld-Underground consist of 'sympathetic resisters'. These individuals (and their organizations, if applicable) are willing to nurture a young 'freedom seeker'. Together,

Sailing Out, Sailing On...

Looking for an adventure this summer? Come sail along the unspoiled coast of Nova Scotia, Canada, with others who are between ages 14 to 18. No experience is necessary. You'll learn everything you need to know from hands-on experience. For generations Nova Scotians have traveled the coast in small boats, learning wisdom and courage from the sea. Today the Nova Scotia Sea School takes young people from around the world out to sea in traditional sailing craft. It's a chance to discover Nova Scotia's heritage, and to discover themselves.

The Nova Scotia Sea School also teaches wooden boat building, helping teens make a small boat themselves. Building a quality boat, well-crafted and seaworthy, and taking command of it in open water, challenges a young person to grow in self-confidence, in self-reliance and as a member of a team. The real world is the real teacher. *Learn more at www.seaschool.org*

they will generate project(s) of learning of their mutual interest and benefit, and decide on a time frame/context for working together. Sympathetic resisters are involved with organic farming, law, theater, consulting, business, the fine arts and more. They include:

Bharat Mansata - is based in Kolkata and Mumbai. He is the founder of Earthcare Books (an alternative book publishing company) and Van-Vadi, a ecological learning community in Maharashtra.

Rustam Vania - is based in Bangalore. A writer and cartoonist, he is the editor-in-chief of *Gobar Times*, an social-environmental magazine for children.

Anjali Panjabi - is based in Mumbai. She is an independent filmmaker, who focuses on socially, culturally and spiritually regenerative films.

Prashant Bhushan - is based in New Delhi. He is a lawyer, who works on social justice issues. He is also actively promoting organic foods and lifestyles.

The Underground Railroad was every route the enslaved took to freedom: paths and roads through swamps and woods, over mountains and rivers, by boats, trains, wagons. The Multiworld Underground is as diverse and vast, full of adventure and well worth the risk. We invite you to join us as a sympathetic resister, freedom seeker, a well-wisher, or in whatever capacity you see fit.

- Claude Alvares and Shilpa Jain
Multiworld Underground Coordinators

Contact us at <taleem@multiworld.org> or <shilpa@swaraj.org> to learn more.

Whispering Seed - Thailand



The Whispering Seed is a village-based community learning center and home for orphaned and abused children. We focus on finding the joy in serving others through cross-cultural exchanges and sustainable simple living skills. We aim to be a model community, where children's voices are honored and respected, and where diversity is celebrated. We value and honor the inherent natural learning processes within every human being and strive to create a healthy, supportive, natural environment where that uniqueness can unfold in its own natural rhythm. Contact us, founders Jim Conner and Nao Sangkara, at <whisperingseed@wildmail.com> to learn more.

resources / opportunities

In November 2004, seven young people (age 14-20) and four adults from Tamariki School in Aotearoa/New Zealand participated in a cultural exchange education program at Whispering Seed in Thailand. For most of the group, it was their first time out of New Zealand. For all, it was their first time in a non-westernized culture. Below are some of their accounts of what they learned in their experience.

"I made a sheet mulch garden. You just put compost, banana leaves, rice husks and grass or straw and leave it all for six months. You can plant the veggies right in the soil. Stomping in the mud is fun and it's affordable — you can make your own house from it! I want to go back and make a mud house right away. It is safe and very friendly to the environment."

- Josh

"The most fun on the trip was swimming with the little children. They just clung to you and jumped on you! Washing ourselves in the freezing river in the early morning, sleeping in bamboo hut in an open space on the floor. That was also fun. What I see here is that people can use stuff around them, natural stuff, like bamboo to make a house, mud to make a house, a long-drop composting toilet. All of it is more open and close to nature."

"I hope we can come back soon. I have never seen the kind of generosity as I found in Thai people. I love the physical open space and buildings in Thailand. I want a simpler and richer life, like I have seen here. I have seen how the students on this trip have changed. They are starting to talk about other people, not just themselves. They are having real life experiences, finding their strengths and abilities to make something in this world."

- Lisa

"We swam, played, cooked, learned some Thai, and visited some amazing places. But, perhaps the most important aspect was the connections that happened between people. There, communication became less about language and more about a willingness to enter each other's world and feel/experience the truth of another person's beliefs, feelings and culture. How does one measure the "learning" in such a setting as the Whispering Seed cultural exchange program? For those educators outside of the mainstream, it is often difficult to justify non-academic areas of learning. This experience has been no exception. But, true education is not about what you can teach me, but rather about how I change/grow as a human being because of my experiences."

-Bob

Upcoming Programs

Exploration of Sustainability - January

We will focus on six areas of sustainability in this month-long camp: permaculture; natural building; herbal health; cotton weaving, spinning and natural dye; holistic learning; and community building.

Rainbow Camp - February

With friends from the Global School in Japan, we will celebrate life, laugh, play, swim, camp, and support the children of this border region.

Alternative Media Program - March

We will host a new program on arts and films: 'Making Mudanimation and Mud Buildings in 10 days'.

Mango Festival - May

We will eat and tell stories under the mango trees on our land in north Thailand. Visit <www.whisperingseed.org> for details.

Book Review: Why We All Lose in the Race to Win

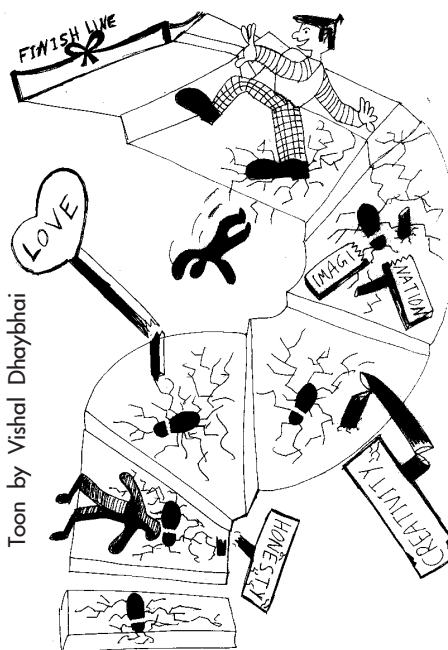
Competition is glorified in today's world. Companies are incited to compete in the global economy, to make competitive products and services, and to have a competitive workforce. Similarly, every aspect of schooling trains children to compete — if not in formal contests and exams, then for grades, ranks, labels, teacher approval, etc. But just as only a few employees are given bonuses, so do only a few children receive prizes, certificates or other rewards. The rest are declared losers; their failure is explained by either a lack of hard work or a lack of ability.

Although the situation may seem unfair, we are all told that, in the 'survival of the fittest', competition is the only way to motivate us to be productive and to do our best. In *No Contest: The Case Against Competition* (1992), Alfie Kohn refutes this myth, as well as three additional myths about competition: that it is part of human nature; that it is the only/best way to have fun; and that it builds character and confidence.

Kohn explains that those who are pro-competition subscribe to a win-lose view of the world. The dominant economic, political and education systems deliberately make 'success' scarce. They create unnatural situations where only a few can win and the rest must lose. (Think about elections, examinations, advertising...) They then use these 'successes' as evidence to promote more cutthroat competition. Kohn cleverly elaborates, "Capitalism works on the same principle as a glass company, whose employees spend their nights breaking people's windows and their days boasting of the public service they provide."

And far from making us do our best, competition actually inhibits us. Kohn cites multiple studies that show that in competitive atmospheres, people produce less spontaneous, less complex, less diverse, and less creative products, while the reverse holds true in cooperative atmospheres. This 'paradox' happens for several reasons. First, competition restricts our vision; it makes us narrowly focus on 'winning' the reward so that we neither use our time or our resources well. At the same time, it breeds hostility,

anxiety, fear of failure, and fear of risk-taking/exploring that further constrains our creativity and performance. Lastly, competition results in a "loss of community and sociability and a heightening of selfishness." It prevents us from working together or caring for each other.



Toon by Vishal Dhaybhai

Those who advocate competition fail to see the fundamental difference between 'learning' and 'competing'. With learning, we give attention to accomplishing the task, the skill or the goal, because we value the effort itself. With competition, we focus on defeating others; the quality of our work is only important insofar as it wins us the reward.

These outcomes not only affect the losers, but also the winners. For those who 'succeed' in competitions, they find themselves further isolated from their peers and community. The egoism and arrogance that results from winning often is used to cover a lack of

self-esteem. 'Winners' find it difficult to be comfortable with themselves, to live and learn without constant comparison to others.

Kohn makes strong recommendations to abandon this competitive ethic and adopt a vision of cooperative learning so each of us can achieve our full potential in ways that are beneficial to the whole community. The "enormous potential of mutual benefit (cooperative) strategies will not be tapped — or even understood — until we broaden our perspective beyond the narrow prejudice that we always do best by trying to beat others."

- Shilpa Jain, Udaipur, India
<shilpa@swaraj.org>

Share your ideas and experiences with us at *Swapathgami* for the next issue!

- How can we heal ourselves from the damage of competition?
- What are spaces/opportunities for promoting cooperation instead of competition in your family, community and other networks?
- How can we convert competitive games and exercises into collaborative experiences?

Unitierra was created by Gustavo Esteva and friends. They had been deeply dissatisfied by the young people's experience with institutionalised education. They noticed that school and university divorced people from their own experience and traditions and thus made them misfits in any kind of setting. Because of their 'education', those from indigenous communities could no longer go back to their rich community life (school and university had taught them to despise that), and because of their origins, they could never manage to fit into the dehumanised life of the city. At Unitierra, people are able to learn skills that they practice in their localities, that enable them to be part of community life.

Escaping Education at Unitierra

In January 2003, at the Asian Social Forum, I met Maria from Paraguay, South America. When she left me with an invitation to come to her country, I started thinking about traveling outside India, something I'd never done before nor given much thought to. I began learning Spanish from an audio course I had downloaded from the internet, and I looked into the possibilities of traveling to Paraguay. It seemed to be really difficult, primarily because of the cost, but also because her country did not have even a consulate in India. I had all but given up hope when one day I heard about Gustavo Esteva in Mexico. He had been involved in the Zapatista movement, with Ivan Illich, and had started the University of the Earth, a place where anyone could come to learn without needing to present prior qualifications or large sums of money. I was full of excitement and enthusiasm, having already read some Illich, and having realised how worthless the Bachelor's degree I'd got in 2001 really was. The more I read of the work that Gustavo was doing, the more interested I became in Mexico in and of itself, not just as a stopover en route to Paraguay.

I have been here for over two months now. I feel the Mexican bug kicking in! In a lot of ways, I'm constantly reminded of life in India. The people share the same generous and fun-loving outlook on life I've experienced in my neighbourhood in Bombay and in Goa. I've even reached a stage where it's really hard for me to believe I'm in a foreign country. And a large part of that experience has been my work at Unitierra. I have been able to see how it is not just Unitierra that enriches the lives of so many young people who would normally be destroyed by the school and university system, but how it is these people who really enrich each others' lives, and eventually life at Unitierra.

Personally, I have helped with the design and publication of a book of study readings for a group of visiting students from indigenous communities from New Zealand, North America and India, without having had any prior experience in publication work. I also have directed a short play in English for the students of the same seminar.

I have learned a lot about the Zapatistas, the indigenous peoples' group who radically re-imagined the concept of rebellion in Latin America by rejecting violence and using Gandhian methods of civil disobedience like no other rebel group in Latin America had done before. They had their first uprising on January 1, 1994, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect. They reached a ceasefire agreement with the Mexican government 12 days later, but the Zapatista movement became a prime mover behind many groundbreaking political and social changes in Mexico. The Zapatistas are guided by principles of 'horizontalism' and direct democracy, instituting rebel governments in villages that truly embodied both principles. In taking their destiny into their own hands, they are making their own decisions, guarding their own future. Though this movement is based in Chiapas, one of Mexico's 'poorest' states, it has quickly caught the imagination of people all over Mexico and the world.

Once at lunch, I told Gustavo about my anarchist phase, my interest in the abolition of work and the right to be lazy (see www.whywork.org and deoxy.org/endwork.htm). He took me to his library, where he took out collections of writings against institutionalised wage labour: "Why Work?" and "Zero Work". He proposed that we organize a seminar at Unitierra where we could discuss these ideas, to which I readily agreed. He also told me that he'd like me to help them in designing some more books for publication and also a website on this theme.

I now also speak fluent Spanish without having gone to any sort of class — just by being part of the various activities here at Unitierra and memorizing/reciting Spanish poetry and texts. I know I will be learning a whole lot more, most of the time without the conscious knowledge that I am learning something. That's the way life is supposed to be. That is what a real education is.

- Lucano Alvares, Mumbai, India
<lucalvares@gmail.com>

Back from the Future: An Interview with Gustavo Esteva

What is your story of walking out?

I was fashioned and pummeled to be one of the middle class westernized Mexicans. At 15, I was forced to support an extended family of siblings, aunts and cousins, becoming first an office-boy in a bank, then later, the youngest executive ever for IBM. But how long could I hide that in generating profits for my corporation, I was cheating my community and exploiting our workers? I was fired from two corporations when I refused to be part of their ploys to avoid giving appropriate pay to their workers or information to their clients. I could not go on. I quit the corporate world.

I tried good government, imagining the orchestration of the revolution from inside (after attempting it from the outside...and quitting for the sake of non violence). In 1976, due to our success, I almost became a Minister in the new administration. But to be at the top is a path of no return. I did not want to be part of the national enterprise; looking down upon the population from high above. The government's interest never coincided with the peoples' interest. I also saw that even the best development programs, like those I was conceiving and implementing, were totally counterproductive and did damage to their supposed beneficiaries. Free distribution of hybrid seeds, for example, in the framework of the Green Revolution, produced a massive destruction of native seeds. I quit one more time.

Next, my journey took me to various niches at the grassroots. Through a series of NGOs, with a group of friends, we attempted to work directly with the people; with peasants in the countryside; with marginal in the cities. With them, we began enjoying a different kind of freedom and autonomy. But with all my educated formal categories, I could not make sense of my daily experience at the grassroots. I assumed I needed to study more, to do more extensive academic research. At a furious pace, I began studying the latest theories of economics, sociology, anthropology, political science... My confusion grew.

What was the turning point in your life?

Two things then happened. First, I started to remember. When I was a child I had asked to be sent to Oaxaca, with my Zapotec grandmother, to enjoy my holidays with her. Remembering what she taught me by her very being, in the market where she tended a stall, I began the slow path of re-membering my people.

Second, I met Ivan Illich. My fascination with Ivan was born out of the fact that his ideas, his words, his writings, were a brilliant intellectual presentation of ordinary people's common discourse. He was describing ways of living and being I encountered all the time at the grassroots, in my grandmother's world; the world of other indigenous peoples. "Vernacular" and "convivial",

two words that are central to Ivan's work, were magnificent symbols for my people's worlds. They allude to their own ways (what is now associated with the struggle for autonomy) and to a communal definition of their beings, based in cooperation, mutual obligations, friendship and common sense. I heard them there, for the first time, and I felt and sensed and smelled and touched and experienced those words and what they symbolized, in the villages, at the grassroots.

What are your thoughts on education?

The very idea of teaching should vanish from the planet. And with it, all the diplomas, all the institutional certifications of knowledge transferred through school, Internet, etc. One of the most important things that I understand is that we learn better when nobody is teaching us. We can observe this in every baby and in our own experiences. Our vital competence comes from learning by doing, without any kind of teaching.

Instead of education, what we really need is conditions for decent living, a community. Our challenge is to find ways to regenerate community in the city, to create a social fabric in which we all, at any age, would be able to learn and every kind of apprenticeships might flourish around us. In doing this radical research, we surprise ourselves, every day, when we discover how easy it can be to create alternatives and how many people are interested in the adventure.

You talk about coming 'back from the future'. What does that mean for you?

Without the certainty of knowing exactly what we are doing, we nourish the hope that we are creating and discovering alternatives to education. We are coming back from the future, living in the present, living in our own places and nourishing our own hopes.

To be back from the future means to avoid the temptation of pretending to know the future and even worse, to be able to control it. Back from the future means resisting the idea of goals, having them, dreaming about them, reaching them... I know nothing about the future, except that it does not exist and I don't know if it will exist for me. I have no goals. My grandmother passed away at age 96, ignoring what it is to have a disease... or to be infected by a goal. We have motives, impulses, forces rooted in precedent, giving us direction and meaning in our living present.

Gustavo Esteva <gustavoesteva@terra.com.mx> is a grassroots activist and deprofessionalized intellectual. Author of many books and essays, former advisor of the Zapatistas, and member of several independent organizations and networks, Mexican and international, he is the founder of Universidad de la Tierra (Unitierra) and lives in a small Indigenous village in Oaxaca, in the south of Mexico.

"Never Work — Don't allow yourself to be bought. Do what you want to do most, not just what you are paid to do. If you sell your time away for money, doing something that is not in itself rewarding for you, you are selling your life away. What could you possibly buy with that money that would be worth the life you have lost?

There is a difference between life and mere survival. The capitalist economy would sell you mere survival at the cost of your life: it does this by making you spend your life working towards other peoples' goals rather than towards your own.

We each have only a short time on this planet to live and find happiness. Is the life you are living the one which will bring you the most happiness? Are you doing what you do because you love it, or for some other reason?

Never Rest — Decide what it is you want in life and go for it! Today we are conditioned to sit still when we are not obeying orders. But if we are to find happiness in this world, we must learn how to act for ourselves again... we must invent our own activities, we must motivate ourselves and never rest in our struggle to take our lives back.

Raise the Stakes — We want complete control over every aspect of our lives; we want to taste the sweetest happiness and most exhilarating liberty this existence has to offer; we don't want to just let our lives pass us by. For this we are willing to risk anything; for this we are willing to fight!"

- excerpted from *Days of War, Nights of Love* (2001)
Check out <http://crimethinc.com> for more insights.

an invitation

"We make the road by walking it."

- Antonio Machado

Swapathgami, available in both Hindi and English, is a bulletin to share ideas, experiences, (un)learnings, useful resources, future opportunities, inspirational mentors, for the vibrant Walkouts-Walkons Network emerging across India and around the world. We invite you to share your essays, poems, cartoons, photographs, stories, quotes, films, books, websites, etc. Contact us at:

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Growing Our Own Learning Webs

Community Media/ Expressions Sites

Raw Vision - Outsider Art

www.rawvision.com

Discover all different kinds of art on this site: intuitive, visionary, folk, art brut and more! See how 'outsiders' (i.e., not your run-of-the-mill institutionalized artists) are creating works of astonishing power and beauty in their lives and communities. Get inspired to find more of the artist in you!

Adbusters

www.adbusters.org

Cultural 'jammers' explode on this site. Find out about different ways to put a wrench in the dominant media and consumer culture: TV Turnoff Week, Buy Nothing Day, and more. See witty counter-ads. Join others who have tuned back into life...

Street Level Youth Media

streetlevel.iit.edu

A creative group working in Chicago with youth and children. See their films and photographs, murals and other expressions. Get new ideas for what you might start in your community.

The Beehive Collective

www.beehivecollective.org

This North American artists group has been sharing its images all around the world. Check out 'insect-ful' graphics that make a buzz about globalization. In their region, they are known for their stone mosaic murals and apprenticeship program. Find out how you might get involved.